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Victory To the Bold

By HARRIET VAN HORNE

IT WAS LIKE old times this week—the good, turbulent old times when TV had daring and thrust—to hear that a timorous sponsor had withdrawn, at the last moment, from Tuesday evening's bold documentary, "The Science of Spying."



Harriet Van Horne

This hour-long examination of the Central Intelligence Agency received first-rate notices, and it is to be hoped that NBC will underscore its faith in its own product by repeating the show.

Critics may have been unusually responsive to "The Science of Spying." It marked the return of NBC to the production of honest documentaries, pertinent to our times and throwing a bold, steady beam on certain "dark areas" of contemporary politics.

"The Science of Spying" did not take the position that the CIA, because it represents Uncle Sam around the world, is always right no matter how it blunders—or where. This was an objective study one that left the agency free of direct criticism by NBC. The most serious charges against the agency came from Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D., Minn.), who questioned the value of any government office that operates above the law and beyond the reach of Congress or the President.

Perhaps most damning of all, to a thoughtful viewer, were the appraisals of the CIA's work by its former chief, Allen Dulles, and one of his deputies, Richard Bissell. This was in the tradition of all honest documentaries.

Let each man speak his piece goes the rationale. And if he points a dagger at his own breast, very well, it's his hand holding the dagger. By permitting all parties to state their arguments, television leaves the ultimate value judgments to the audience. It's right and proper, this process. One can only wish that NBC had followed this process more frequently.

The completed study of the CIA was shown to the sponsor's representatives on the eve of the show. The representatives, the famous agency known as Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, Inc., decided that the hour was too controversial for the B. F. Goodrich Co. (One wonders if the people who make the vital decisions at Goodrich would have thought so, had they all attended—with open minds—a preview showing.)

Assuming its customary pious stance, BBD&O pronounced "The Science of Spying" detrimental to the interests of the United States government. NBC said "it would assume full responsibility for the program's editorial judgments." But BBD&O picked up its tires and went home.

Were this almost any other ad agency, an observer might react with surprise. But BBD&O has long been noted for its rigid, right of center policies. During the days of blacklisting, when no TV director dared assemble a program without consulting Red channels and the scurrilous bulletin known as AWARE (later the loser in a \$3,500,000 libel suit brought by John Henry Faulk) BBD&O was the agency most ready to sanction these abuses.

At one of the Congressional hearings on TV program practices, a producer named Audrey Gellen testified to the incessant meddling in the dramatic shows by BBD&O. "They wanted a strong, hard-hitting controversial show that wouldn't offend anybody," she said.

And a night that will live in infamy—the churlish, snarling rebuttal of Sen. Joseph McCarthy to the late Ed Murrow's candid appraisal of him—reportedly owed much to BBD&O. It was Joe's friends at that agency who assisted him in his cheap—and futile—counterattack on Murrow.

When Rod Serling wrote a powerful drama for the U.S. Steel Hour, based on the famous Emmett Till lynching, a BBD&O man insisted that the locale of the story be moved to New England and the lynching omitted! According to Serling, nothing was left but lifeless characters "mouthing platitudes."

Well, we may take heart from one simple fact: the CIA show did go on.